

## Chemical Summer by Tousled\_Sky

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**Summary:**

Susan comes over one day with a little girl in tow.

The child has hair the color of fire, the locks wavy like flames in a breeze. Her face is flushed and sprinkled with freckles, eyes the same shade of green as Susan's are.

Billy dislikes her immediately.

## Chemical Summer

### Author's Note:

I wrote this a few weeks ago, planning on making a multichapter fanfic, but my writing deliberately disobeyed me and now we've got this drabble. I like what I've got, though, so I figured why not post it. And yes, I love Stranger Things, and Billy. He's a horrible person, but we've seen how his dad is to him - hurt people hurt people.  
Hope you enjoy the story, loves~

Billy is thirteen when his dad meets Susan.

Susan is fairly different than his dad's (or Neil, as Billy has taken to calling his father in the privacy of his own mind) previous girlfriends. Most of them had a lot of tattoos and dyed-blond hair, didn't have a lot of money and had no interest in Billy whatsoever. Susan has a rosary in her purse and a college degree, and always brings Billy something when she comes over to their house - a bottle of soda, a comic book, and one time even a video game cartridge.

Perhaps, then, it's a bit baffling that Billy prefers Neil's previous girlfriends to Susan.

It wasn't that Susan was a bad person - quite the opposite. And perhaps that was the problem. Neil was obviously trying to impress Susan, and as such, was harder on Billy now - always yelling at him about getting better marks in school, telling him to try out for basketball this October.

Billy doesn't even like basketball.

Oh, but Susan thinks it's "so cute" when teens have school spirit. Thinks it's just *precious* when there's a game in the gym, with the kids in their bright jerseys and the eighth-grade cheerleaders with their pom-poms and the fans in the risers. She'll always chatter about how much she loved sporting events as a teen, how she went to every basketball and soccer and football game, how she was on the

volleyball team, and how spirited it always was.

Billy thinks she's stuck seeing the past through rose-colored glasses.

But it's *Billy* who needs to change to fit *Susan's* perfect perception. *Billy* who needs to work harder so that Neil can impress Susan. *Billy* who gets in trouble when Neil finds cigarettes in his room, not because they're bad for his health and Neil is concerned, but instead because, as Neil put it, "what would Susan think if she found out about this?!"

Of course, Neil never yells at Billy in front of Susan. When Susan is around, Neil is a different person; he never smokes or drinks or curses in front of her. The first time Billy curses in front of Susan, Neil boxes him in the ears - once she's left, that is.

Because Neil never hits Billy in front of Susan, either. He never slaps him in front of the woman, or punches him, or burns him - pressing the cigarette into the child's arm like he had threatened when Billy was ten and had actually done for the first time when he was eleven.

Never in front of Susan, but he'll certainly do it once she leaves.

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Susan comes over one day with a little girl in tow.

The child has hair the color of fire, the locks wavy like flames in a breeze. Her face is flushed and sprinkled with freckles, eyes the same shade of green as Susan's are.

Billy dislikes her immediately. Even worse, Max seemed to like *him*. Following him around and trying to talk to him.

"What's that?"

Billy glares up at the little girl, who had followed him into the living room while Neil and Susan are off doing something else. Maybe fucking. Hopefully producing a less annoying child than Maxine.

(But honestly, any child of Susan's is going to annoy Billy, just by virtue of their blood. It's not really Maxine herself that bothers Billy -

it's her lineage. It's that she's related to the cause of Neil being such a controlling asshole to Billy lately.)

"An Atari 2600." Billy snaps as way of explanation, plugging in the console's joystick. He's hoping Max will get bored and go away, but no such luck - at the word *Atari*, Maxine's eyes light up with glee.

"An Atari? Really? Wow! My friend Donna has one of those, or at least has one that she has to share with her brother. It looks fun but I haven't had a chance to try it. What games do you have? Are any multiplayer? Can I play too?"

"JESUS CHRIST, do you ever shut the FUCK UP?" Billy snapped at the girl. "NO, you can't play - I don't need some stupid kid breaking my console. Girls are shit at video games anyways. Go bother someone else."

Max stared at him, frozen in place, hurt on her young face. For some reason, it only made Billy even more furious than he already was.

"Are you deaf? I told you to go away! FUCK OFF!" He shouted at the little girl.

That did the trick - Max's face contorted and she started crying, running from the room.

Unfortunately for Billy, she also ran right to her mother, who was talking in the yard with Neil. Crying about how Billy was "mean" and had cursed at her.

Neil slammed the door open and stormed into the living room, stomping his foot right through Billy's Atari. Billy's protests were cut short by his father grabbing him by the ear - the most physical he had ever gotten with the boy to date in front of Susan - and dragging him to his feet.

"Apologize to Maxine." He had growled, twisting the teen's ear when he wasn't quick enough to reply.

"Sorry." Billy had hissed under his breath. Neil dug his nails into the shell of Billy's ear.

"Apologize PROPERLY." He had said quite a bit louder - not quite shouting, but not far from it. Billy had grimaced and spoken again through gritted teeth.

"I'm sorry, Maxine."

"That's so sweet of you, Billy - what do you say back, sweetie?" Susan asked, coaxing her child, doubtlessly as keen on impressing Neil through Max as Neil was on impressing Susan through Billy. Max rubbed at her puffy eyes and looked up to address the boy.

"It's okay, Billy."

Billy could tell from her tone and face that she didn't mean it. She didn't like him as much as she had a few minutes ago.

*Good. He thought bitterly. Let her hate me. I want her to hate me.*

*Because I hate her too.*

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Susan's a devote catholic, so of course they start attending church services. Yet another part of Billy's life changed because of Susan.

Though Neil and Billy have never attended church regularly before, Billy recalls that Neil has always been religious in a fucked-up way. Not in a "love thy neighbor" sort of way - he never seemed interested in donating to the less fortunate, or forgiving grudges, or all the things that Jesus apparently preached. However, he certainly seemed well-read on the Bible when conversation arose on topic which Neil felt he could safely look down upon. The "moral failures" of others - prostitution, addiction, suicide.

Homosexuality.

Homosexuality is a hot topic in the church right now - the high school just approved a gay-straight alliance for it's students, and all the religious nuts in the town are seething about it. The conversation in the lobby of the church is all centered around the topic, and when the congregation finally settles into the pews, the priest strides up to the alter. His voice booms out some quotes from Genesis 19 - Billy

tries to ignore him, not caring about Sodom or Gomorrah, whoever they were.

Neil discretely elbows him - hard - in the ribs when he sees that Billy's not paying attention. Billy internally groans, raising his head again to listen to the priest's current bullshit.

"I, like many in this community, am deeply troubled and outraged by the fact that our schools are now promoting homosexuality among the student body." Father Johnathan is saying, riling up the congregation, who are crossing themselves and clasping their hands in a frenzy. "The act of normalizing such a spiritually damaging mental illness is a testament to the moral weakness of America today. Though our nation may be turning away from God - may be throwing aside the value this country was based on - keep in mind that a sin is still a sin. The Bible is very clear on what a man whom sleeps with a man is - an *abomination*. Any such a vile creature whom harbors lust for the same sex in their heart *will* burn in hell."

Billy stares furiously at the floor, biting on his tongue to keep from clenching his teeth, wanting to be anywhere but here.

Liking boys was hard enough without some preacher making him hate himself for it.

A resounding chorus of "*Amen*" ripples through the church like a wave.

Or maybe more like a disease.

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Susan and Neil are married on a warm June day when Billy is fifteen.

The wedding is stupid. The reception is stupid.

Everything is stupid.

Billy escapes the "festivities" (more like torture to him), slipping behind the community center where the reception is being held. He sighs, leaning against the rough brick wall and running a hand through his dirty blond hair, tugging a little harder than maybe

strictly necessary. The pain feels good; grounding after such an emotionally taxing ordeal.

He glances both ways for any adults and, seeing no one in sight, pulls his cigarettes out of his jacket pocket. He lights one, inhaling the smoke and holding it in his lungs as he closes his eyes and tilts his head back against the wall.

"Where did you even get those?"

Billy's body jerks in surprise, dropping his cigarette that's been dangling from his fingers, arm loose at his side. He exhales the breath he'd been holding from the surprise, the smoke rushing from his lungs.

Maxine stares at him from behind the locks of fiery hair that have fallen in her face.

Great. Just fucking fantastic.

Billy huffs. "The corner store on Main Street doesn't give a rat's ass about how old you are as long as you're willing to pay for the cigs. I've seen them sell to ten-year-olds before, buying from them is no problem." He eyes her warily. "Are you gonna rat me out to Neil or Susan?"

She considers him for a moment before holding out her hand, palm-up. "Not if you let me try one."

"Fucking shit." He mutters, pulling two cigarettes out of the box - the one he's dropped is covered in the grime and grit of the parking lot, he's not going to pick it up and risk contracting some fucked-up disease. "These aren't cheap, you know." He complains as he hands Max one.

"That's why I'm cadging one off you." Max replies smugly, taking the offered cigarette. Billy lights his own with a flick of his lighter and a rapid inhale, tossing it to Max. She takes the lighter in one hand and the cigarette in the other, seemingly at a loss for what to do. She tries to light the cigarette like a candle, or a stick of incense - holding the flame to it's tip. She looks perplexed when it doesn't catch, before

trying again.

"Oh my god, stop. STOP, you retard." Billy snaps, snatching the items from her hands. "You put the cigarette IN your mouth," he holds the filter to her lips until she opens her mouth to practically bite down on it, looking just as annoyed with him as he is with her, "and then you light it while you inhale." He instructs, flicking the flame from the lighter and holding it to the tip of the cigarette.

The paper catches as Max breathes in. Unfortunately for her, she's taken an enormous gasp of breath.

Billy laughs his ass off at her as she coughs and gasp for breath, the smoke spilling from her lips as she empties her lungs of the chemicals.

"You're so stupid!" He exclaims, gleeful with spite. "Why would you try to inhale so much when you've never smoked before?"

Max glares at him, wiping her mouth. Wordlessly, she raises the cigarette back to her lips, taking an even deeper inhale than before. Her face contorts in a grimace, but her eyes remain steely, locked with his. She tips her chin up as she breathes out evenly, smoke pouring from her nose like a dragon.

She obviously didn't like it any better than the first time, but she didn't cough once. She looks smug - like it's something to be proud of.

Dumb lil' kid.

"Real impressive, little sister." Billy coos condescendingly, reaching out and patting her wavy hair. She bats his hand away, temper just as fiery as her hair.

"Our parents might be married, but that doesn't mean we're siblings. And you're still an asshole. Just because you gave me a cigarette doesn't mean I hate you any less."

Billy smiles, blowing out smoke into the sunshine as Max tentatively takes another experimental drag of her own.

Finally, something they can agree on.



"Feeling's mutual, kid."

**Author's Note:**

Urghhhh maybe someday I'll write something where Max and Billy actually can have a healthy relationship. Hopefully. Regardless, I hope you guys enjoyed this one! Drop me a review, loves <3